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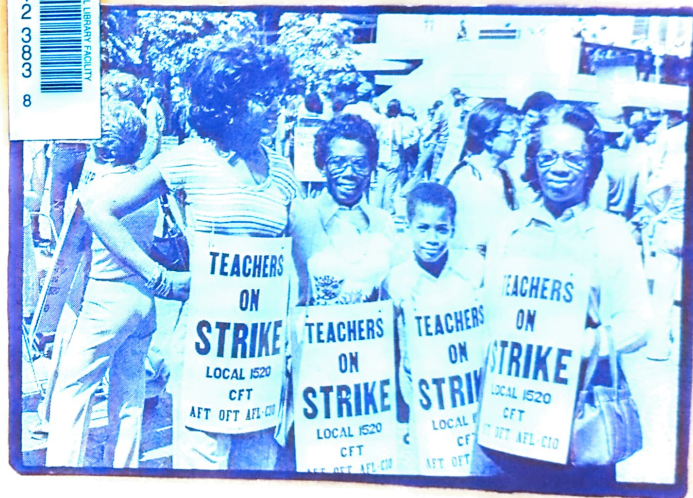


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Teachers Under Attack

LABOR UNIONS - TEACHERS
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An alternative to the
 "business unionism"
 of Albert Shanker

[Pathfinder Press
 [misc. price]]

by Jeff Mackler



Lou Howort

Jeff Mackler has been a teacher and an activist in the American Federation of Teachers for the past eleven years and a delegate to the past seven AFT conventions. He is the organizer and former vice-president of AFT Local 1423 in Hayward, California, and former president of the Alameda County Council of the AFT.

Mackler was a member of the United Federation of Teachers in New York City from 1966 to 1970 and was elected to the UFT delegate assembly. He was chairperson of the New Coalition Caucus in the UFT, which defended Black and Puerto Rican community control of schools and defied the racist 1968 UFT strike.

Mackler was cochairperson of the AFT Vietnam Caucus and official representative from the California Federation of Teachers to the National Peace Action Coalition. He also served as cochairperson of the AFT Caucus on Desegregation and Equality in Education.

Jeff Mackler is a member of the Socialist Workers Party national committee and a frequent contributor to the weekly socialist newspaper, the *Militant*. A twelve-week introductory subscription to the *Militant* can be obtained for two dollars from the Militant Business Office, 14 Charles Lane, New York, N.Y. 10014.

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1. EDUCATION UNDER ATTACK

Public education is under attack. Every teacher can see it and feel it.

School budgets are cut back at all levels of government. Even when budgets are maintained at the same dollar amounts, rising costs mean they have been cut in real buying power.

Thousands of teachers are unemployed. In spring 1977 alone, another 70,000 persons graduated who want to enter teaching but cannot find jobs. Yet class sizes are being increased, programs slashed, and the quality of education is falling sharply.

Hardest hit are working class students. Of these, Black, Latino, and other minority students fare the worst. Special programs such as bilingual education and Black studies are the first to be wiped out. With educational financing dependent on local property taxes, poor and especially minority communities are permanently condemned to inadequate school facilities.

The proportion of minority teachers, inadequate to begin with, has been drastically reduced in many cities through "last hired, first fired" layoffs.

School desegregation plans face violent resistance from racist bigots, school boards, and other antilabor forces.

Local school boards, pleading poverty, take a hard line against teachers' demands. They threaten layoffs and refuse to grant salary increases that would keep up with inflation. Teachers and other public employees are made the scapegoats for rising taxes.

When we are forced to strike, courts readily hand down back-to-work injunctions. Teacher strikes remain illegal in most states.

Many teachers were shocked and outraged in 1974 when the Hortonville, Wisconsin, and Timberlane, New Hampshire, school boards fired their entire teaching staffs for going on strike and replaced them with scabs. But Hortonville and Timberlane were only the beginning. In cities and towns across the country, hundreds of teachers have been fired or jailed for exercising their union rights.

These union-busting attacks are escalating. In spring 1977 more than 150 teachers were arrested on the picket lines of the Kansas City Federation of Teachers. The Racine Education Association was forced on strike, and nearly 400 of its members were arrested. And after a strike by the Cincinnati Federation of Teachers, leading union activists were singled out for firing.

Just at the time when more and more teachers feel the need for a strong union, our very right to organize and bargain collectively as teachers is in jeopardy. Neither the 450,000-member American Federation of Teachers nor the 1.8-million-member National Education Association has found a strategy for defending our schools, jobs, and union rights.

Teachers are asking, What can we do?

I want to propose a course that may initially sound strange to many teachers, but I hope you'll hear me out. I propose that we take a lesson from what is happening in the United Steelworkers of America (USWA). A movement for union democracy and militancy has arisen in the USWA. It's called Steelworkers Fight Back.

2. TEACHERS AND STEELWORKERS

Steelworkers Fight Back became nationally prominent when Ed Sadlowski, a thirty-eight-year-old steelworker from Chicago, ran as Fight Back candidate for international union president in the February 1977 USWA election.

Sadlowski was defeated by Lloyd McBride, the handpicked successor to retiring union President I. W. Abel. But a quarter of a million steelworkers—43 percent of those voting—marked their ballots for the Steelworkers Fight Back slate. Thousands came to rallies, gave money, passed out leaflets, and became volunteer organizers. The response to Sadlowski's campaign showed the potential for building a mass, rank-and-file movement for union democracy.

The ideas Sadlowski raised have implications for all working people, including teachers. "People all over the country have begun to feel they've lost control over their government, their standard of living, and their lives in general," he said. "People who have worked for years to provide a little economic security for their families can't make ends meet. We've got a government full of corruption and national leaders that are often so beholden to the special interests and big monopolies that they might as well be on their payrolls. The government can find millions to bail out big businesses, but can't find enough to finance a decent health insurance system." Or, I might add, decent schools.

What Steelworkers Fight Back proposed is a radical change in direction for the American labor movement. "The only way we can fight back is through our unions," Sadlowski said, "but in the last few years, the leadership of many unions simply hasn't done the job. In

fact, many labor leaders today have become absolutely conservative. They've bought into the national status quo. . . . They have no intention of making the labor movement into a vehicle through which everyday Americans can substitute democracy for the monopoly control that dominates so much of our political and economic lives."

Not surprisingly, Steelworkers Fight Back drew heavy fire from the AFL-CIO hierarchy. AFL-CIO President George Meany publicly backed McBride and attacked Sadlowski. Meany said he had never before interfered in the internal politics of an AFL-CIO union, but that in this case it was "impossible to remain silent."

The heads of the steel corporations, government officials, editorial writers for the *Wall Street Journal* and *New York Times*, right-wing columnists such as Rowland Evans and Robert Novak—all joined in trying to discredit the Steelworkers Fight Back campaign.

Another person who found it "impossible to remain silent" was Albert Shanker—president of the AFT; president of the AFT's affiliate in New York City, the United Federation of Teachers; and the most prominent teachers' union official in the United States.

Shanker vs. Sadlowski

Every week, dues money from UFT members goes to print a column by Shanker as a paid advertisement in the Sunday *New York Times*. In his December 26, 1976, column, Shanker blasted the Fight Back campaign under the headline "New Danger to Union Democracy."

Steelworkers Fight Back, Shanker



Abel's handpicked successor had outside support, too.

charged, was "a new threat to workers being represented by unions of their own." How so? Because, Shanker said, Sadlowski was the pawn of "wealthy tax-exempt foundations, Harvard professors, radical chic movie stars, anti-union employers in other industries, leaders of the left wing of the Democratic Party, and newspapers and TV stations which have had strong anti-union histories."

Shanker is a clever debater, and this was a bold line of attack. After all, Sadlowski was almost universally seen as the *victim* of undemocratic practices, challenging an entrenched bureaucratic machine.

A third-generation steelworker, Sadlowski had joined the union as an eighteen-year-old laborer at U.S. Steel's South Works in Chicago. He was

elected president of USWA Local 65 at age twenty-five and broke tradition by continuing to work in the mill while holding union office. At the 1968 union convention, the young local president was jeered for urging an end to union support for the Vietnam War.

In 1973 Sadlowski ran for director of USWA District 31 (Chicago-Gary) against the machine choice, Sam Evett. Evett won the official count, it is now acknowledged, through mass stuffing of the ballot boxes. But the USWA international executive board upheld the rigged results. Sadlowski challenged the vote-theft in court and secured a new election. In a government-supervised rerun with 300 Labor Department observers, Sadlowski won by a whopping two-to-one majority.

When Sadlowski moved to gain national support in 1976, his campaigners were met with harassment and violence. Teams of steelworkers traveling through the South to leaflet and meet potential supporters were beaten and chased away from some plant gates by union officials and staff. Ben Corum, a local union president from Illinois, was shot and almost killed while leafletting the Hughes Tool plant in Houston. The would-be assassin was never caught.

Shanker's column on "union democracy" registered no protest against election-rigging by the steelworkers officialdom. Nor did Shanker raise his voice against violent intimidation of campaigners. And his column contained not one word about the democratic right of steelworkers to vote on their own contracts—a right championed by the Sadlowski forces and denied by the Abel-McBride leadership.

Instead, Shanker stuck doggedly to the charge that Sadlowski was backed by "outsiders." Shanker named names: Prof. John Kenneth Galbraith, Jane

Fonda, Ossie Davis, "Democratic party politicians" Ted Sorensen and Richard Goodwin, "wealthy industrialist" Howard Samuels. With "money and publicity" from these sinister sources, Shanker said, Sadlowski might be capable of "reaching 1.4 million members and providing watchers at 7,000 polling places across the country (and in Canada)." The poll watchers in particular could be expected to threaten Abel and McBride's version of union democracy.

Teachers reading Shanker's warnings could only be thankful that our union democracy faces no danger like Sadlowski—since national AFT officers are not elected by direct vote of the ranks.

It was never substantiated that all those on Shanker's "outsider" list in fact had anything whatsoever to do with the Sadlowski campaign. Theodore Sorensen, for example, whom Jimmy Carter nominated for CIA director, issued a statement denying any ties to Sadlowski and declaring, "I have at no time taken any position, expressed any opinion, authorized any use of my name or participated in any other way in any union election of any kind at any time." This correction was never acknowledged by Shanker in his column or anywhere else.

'Basic economic interests'

Shanker's charges thus boil down to the fact that a number of liberals, some of them well-to-do, had given some money or otherwise extended support to the Steelworkers Fight Back campaign. These were the same kind of people—and many of the same individuals—who have also supported antiwar coalitions, the civil rights movement, and organizing drives by the United Farm Workers and southern textile workers. But they have no business, according to

Shanker, giving aid and comfort to those who want to reform the unions.

"One thing is certain," Shanker said, "not one of these outside groups really cares about the wages, hours, working conditions or job security—the basic economic interests—of the steelworkers."

Suddenly the real point of Shanker's scathing attack against Steelworkers Fight Back emerged. Because not one teacher, in New York or elsewhere, could fail to notice what Shanker left out: *What about the wages, hours, working conditions, and job security of teachers under Shanker's leadership?*

Shanker didn't say. But in an article published in the *New York Teacher* (February 6, 1977), Sandra Feldman, special assistant to Albert Shanker, gives a good summary of the situation in New York City. She writes: "In one year, approximately 21,000 school workers had been laid off. As the city pared its budget to meet the demands of fiscal emergency, it cut the school staff twice as much as other city employees. . . .

"In addition to the loss of nearly 12,000 classroom teachers, the schools suffered drastic reductions in guidance counselors, attendance teachers, para-professionals, security guards, laboratory technicians, secretaries, course offerings, after school programs, adult school programs, adult evening centers, library services. For more than 40,000 handicapped children, supportive services were slashed more than 20 per cent and 1,000 specially trained teachers were lost."

What Shanker really fears is that the spectacular setbacks to the schools, to teachers, and to the union are leading growing numbers of teachers to question his policies.

In the past, the overwhelming sentiment in the ranks of the AFT was roughly this: "You may dislike a lot of what Shanker says or does, but at least

he delivers for teachers." That image—the tough negotiator, the shrewd political maneuverer, the man who gets things done—is fading fast.

Shanker's apparently absolute domination over the AFT scarcely conceals the rising sentiments of discontent and uncertainty. Thousands of teachers are looking for a new policy, one that will effectively defend *their* "basic economic interests," and the interests of students and education as well.

One great accomplishment of the AFT over the years has been to spread the idea that teachers are working people, whose interests lie with those of other workers and especially the organized labor movement. Many of the problems of teachers are not, after all, so different from the problems of steelworkers. We both face ever higher prices at the grocery store and often live in fear of losing our jobs. Steelworkers are certainly just as concerned that their children get a good education as we are with providing it. The attacks on teachers are part of an overall offensive against other unions and the living standards of all workers. And Albert

Shanker would be the first to say that teachers can meet these attacks only in alliance with the labor movement.

But while Shanker puts an equals sign between labor and the George Meany leadership of the AFL-CIO, the Steelworkers Fight Back campaign opens a different possibility for teachers to consider. That is, to ally ourselves with an insurgent movement of workers challenging Meany's and Shanker's grip over the unions.

What is significant for teachers is not Shanker versus Sadlowski as *individuals*, but the different *policies* and *program* these two figures represent. That's the real reason it is true, as Shanker wrote, that the steel campaign was "not just another union election." But whereas Shanker, like Abel and McBride and Meany, sought to dodge debate on the issues by howling about a few professors and movie stars backing Sadlowski, I believe many teachers—in both the AFT and the NEA—will find it worthwhile to examine the real program of Steelworkers Fight Back and compare it point by point to the policies of Shankerism.

3. TWO ROADS FOR LABOR

Union democracy

From the beginning, the rallying cry of the Steelworkers Fight Back movement was *democratic, rank-and-file control* of the unions. Sadlowski and his running mates declared: "A clique has developed within our Union composed of officers and some staff members who enjoy salaries and fringe benefits far beyond those of the best paid members of our Union. No longer are the members the decision makers of our Union. The leaders on the top have

decided: 'We know what is best for the membership.' . . . We are determined to change all that. We want to return our Union to its original purpose and put control back into the hands of the members. . . . We believe that if the Union is run as it should be—openly and democratically—for the members instead of the officers—the tough problems can be tackled and problems will be solved."

There is no way the members can run the Union if they don't have the right to

vote on their own contracts. But this elementary right is denied to some 400,000 USWA members in the basic steel industry.

The most basic right of all workers is the right to withhold their labor, the right to strike. This was signed away by Abel in 1973 in the no-strike Experimental Negotiating Agreement (ENA). And the ENA itself was never submitted to a vote of the members!

Abel and McBride claimed that the USWA is a "representative democracy." But steel union conventions are dominated by hundreds of staff representatives carrying credentials from the many small locals that are too poor to send their own delegates. And the record shows that collective-bargaining demands and other policies adopted by conventions are simply ignored by the top officials, who negotiate contracts in secret with their corporate counterparts.

Steelworkers Fight Back literature listed the following program to begin to implement union democracy in steel:

- Union run for the members, not the officers

- Membership should vote on all contracts

- End to staff domination of union conventions

- Delegates to be shop-floor workers or elected leaders

- Democratic conventions which allow opposing points of view

- Convention working committees selected by delegates

- Stop physical intimidation and reprisals

- Fair election procedures and honest vote count."

And when Abel and McBride sent up trial balloons about abolishing referendum election of officers, Sadlowski affirmed his stand that the rank and file should elect every union representative, from the staff right up to the head of the AFL-CIO.

Albert Shanker, of course, claims to defend union democracy—of the "representative" variety, like that in the USWA. He has fought every attempt to have the top officers of the AFT directly elected by membership referendum. Shanker has never been accused of stuffing ballot boxes. He is slicker than that. But anyone who has been active in the AFT knows that the formal democracy that exists in the union is often manipulated and undermined by the Shanker machine.

One of Shanker's favorite devices to subvert membership rights is the "unit rule." Under this procedure a minority in an AFT local—no matter how many votes it gets—has no representation at union conventions. The huge delegations from New York, Chicago, Detroit, and Philadelphia represent only the majority view resulting from the local union elections. In the April 1977 UFT elections in New York, for example, Shanker's opposition received 27 percent of the vote. But all 500 UFT delegates at the 1977 AFT convention will be from Shanker's "Unity Caucus." This system is repeated in most of the big AFT delegations.

Then, at conventions, Shanker and his allies impose the unit-rule voting system within most of their large delegations. In effect, the majority in the delegation casts the votes of the entire delegation. In the UFT, tellers collect the delegates' ballots before they are placed in the ballot boxes, to make sure the rule is enforced. Delegates thus cast bloc votes on issues that may well have never been discussed by the membership. They are barred from changing their minds on issues as a result of the floor debate. The logical next step is to eliminate conventions altogether and simply rent a computer to tally the votes.

The unit rule acts as a lever giving Shanker monolithic control even

though his supporters may be only a slim majority or even a minority among the members. In addition, holding AFT conventions in distant places such as Honolulu (1975) and Miami (1976) effectively disfranchises smaller locals that are too poor to send delegates.

A democratic union would value the differences of opinion in the membership and recognize an obligation to represent within the leadership the broad spectrum of opinion on the issues. But Shanker's weekly newspaper, the *New York Teacher*, excludes all opposition views, except in a single election issue once every two years. UFT policy prohibits from the paper even paid advertisements from union groups and caucuses. The only view expressed is the view of the Shanker clique.

Teachers who want to fight for union democracy may thus find the steelworkers' list of demands a useful starting point, and may wish to add a few proposals:

- Referendum election of all national union officers;

- Provide space in the AFT press for discussion by the ranks;

- Proportional representation of minority views at conventions—abolish the unit rule.

Civil liberties

On one point, Shanker's antidemocratic methods are in complete harmony with those of the Abel-McBride bureaucracy in the steelworkers union. That is the use of red-baiting against dissenters or political opponents within the union.

Until the late sixties Shanker and his allies managed to keep a clause in the AFT constitution barring "communists and other totalitarians" from membership. Finally bending to the pressure to

eliminate such remnants of the McCarthyite witch-hunt, Shanker announced: "Many of our civil liberties friends find our membership bar of communists distasteful. We have decided to eliminate it. But I want to make it clear that we have other ways of dealing with communists in our union."

What the "other ways" amounted to was branding teacher activists as "reds" if they opposed the Vietnam War, supported Black and Puerto Rican demands for community control of schools, or otherwise challenged Shanker's policies. Shanker's gimmick is simple—call your opponent a communist and you can dodge discussion of the real issues facing teachers.

Steelworkers Fight Back demanded abolition of the anticommunist clause still in the USWA constitution and condemned red-baiting as "the bosses' game." When the Abel-McBride machine demanded that Fight Back carry out a witch-hunt in its own ranks against socialists or communists, Sadlowski replied, "I don't ask people how they vote or what their political affiliations are, as long as they pay dues into this organization."

Even though considerable evidence has been brought to light of FBI harassment and victimization of teachers for their political views, the Shankerite AFT leadership has refused to give any backing to the lawsuits and civil liberties groups fighting FBI crimes. UFT Secretary Jules Kolodny said teachers had to "weigh" the fact that the victims of FBI spying, burglaries and so on—specifically the Socialist Workers Party—had often opposed the policies of "our" union.

For Shanker, like Meany, civil liberties and the Bill of Rights apply only to those whose political views he approves of.

Collective bargaining and the right to strike

At the heart of the Steelworkers Fight Back program was a simple principle: *The interests of the workers and the bosses are not the same—they are opposed. And the purpose of the union is to fight for the needs of the workers, not to look out for the profits of the employers.*

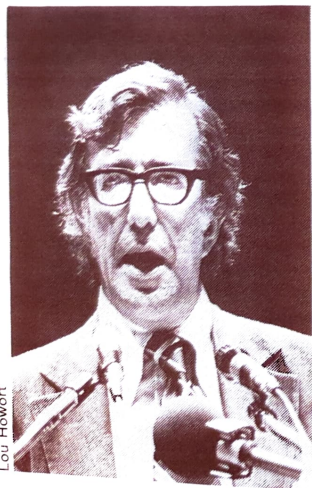
"The worker and the boss have nothing in common," Sadlowski says. "It is a class question."

Shanker, Meany, Abel, McBride, and the rest of the AFL-CIO hierarchy vehemently oppose this view of unions. They insist that workers and employers are "partners" in a mutually beneficial endeavor. So long as the employer is doing well financially, the worker will prosper, dues income will flow steadily into the union coffers, and the top officers can live in their accustomed style. The role of the union, in the eyes of these "labor statesmen," is to facili-

tate the smooth functioning of this partnership with the employer.

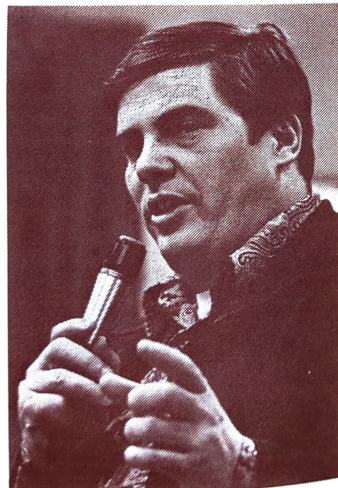
In a private industry such as steel, the result is union support to monopoly price-gouging, import curbs, productivity drives, and other profiteering measures by the companies.

In a public service such as education, the strategy of "partnership" has led more than one AFT or NEA local to support higher property and sales taxes—taxes that hit working people the hardest. (School boards, often dominated by corporate representatives, never propose higher taxes on profits.) Bitter experience shows that after teachers back school board tax proposals, and consequently become isolated from other working people, their "partner" quickly turns on the union and demands wage limits, larger classes, cuts in teacher benefits, and so on.



Lou Howort

Albert Shanker



Lynn Henderson

Ed Sadlowski

The understanding by Steelworkers Fight Back of the basic antagonism between worker and employer led them to oppose the no-strike ENA and any restriction on the right to strike. Oliver Montgomery, Fight Back candidate for USWA vice-president, put it this way: "We say steelworkers should have the right to determine when and if they should use the weapon of the strike to get the bosses off their backs. We say that the right to strike is synonymous with the word union. If the foreman or the companies have the right to fire, there can be no balance of power unless we have the right to strike."

Shanker puts little faith in the right to strike. He does not believe in mobilizing the real power of teachers to defend education against the current attacks. The results of Shanker's "partnership" policy are clearly seen in the plight of New York City teachers.

When schools opened in September 1975, New York City teachers found themselves facing class sizes of forty, fifty, and even higher; thousands of layoffs; and school board demands to slash benefits. A wage freeze was already in effect. Teachers voted overwhelmingly for strike action to restore jobs and reduce class sizes. It was the strongest strike in the UFT's history—both in community support and in solidarity among teachers.

Shanker later admitted that he had opposed the strike from the beginning. He had already agreed with the board of education that there was "no money" and that no more than a handful of teachers would be rehired. He pressured teachers back to work after five days with the dishonest promise that "all of us will be back in a short period of time."

The meager gains for teachers under the settlement came from only two sources: from the money forfeited by teachers themselves while on strike,

and from cutting class time for students. These terms, a bitter disappointment for teachers, were greeted with outrage by parent and community supporters of the strike. Shanker had led teachers right into the trap set by the board to divide them from their potential allies in the Black, Puerto Rican, and other working class communities.

Less than a month later, even this miserable contract was rejected as "too expensive" by the Emergency Financial Control Board—the bank-dominated body set up by Shanker's "friends" in the state legislature to oversee the New York cutback program. As school conditions continued to deteriorate, Shanker warned the frustrated teachers against renewed strike action or mass demonstrations. "We can't use the weapons of the last war to fight the next war," he said.

New 'weapons'?

And what were Shanker's new "weapons"?

Throughout 1976 the UFT lobbied vigorously for the Stavisky-Goodman bill in the state legislature. This measure accepted the overall budget cutbacks in city services. It asked only that some funds be restored to education by cutting other services—child care, health, transportation, and so on—even more. After prolonged legislative wrangling the bill was passed. The result? The city administration simply ignored the law, and cutbacks and layoffs continued.

In November 1976, Shanker proposed to surrender collective bargaining altogether for the duration of the New York City crisis! "When there's nothing to be bargained for, it's a form of torture to send people in to bargain," he said. It will just "create a lot of internal dissension within a union"—

presumably from teachers who don't agree with Shanker that society can no longer afford to pay for decent schools.

In place of bargaining, Shanker suggested creation of a tripartite board "to take care of inequities." It would be patterned after the War Labor Board of World War II (which Shanker falsely paints up as having been "fair" to labor), with representatives from labor and management, and "neutrals."

Shanker repeatedly likened the city fiscal crisis to a "war" in which all should cooperate and sacrifice equally. But this proposal has found no takers among those managing the crisis in New York. They know that the real war is not a war to "save the city" but a war against the rights and living standards of New York workers. They are widening the war to include more and more cities. Teachers around the country can judge from the latest New York City budget—which proposes millions of dollars in tax cuts for business and the rich, continued service cutbacks for workers—just how much "equality of sacrifice" this war entails.

Shanker must hope that in return for his cooperation on a phony "equal sacrifice" board the city's rulers would guarantee the sanctity of the UFT's dues checkoff, which the state has threatened to revoke as punishment for the 1975 strike. Shanker does not relish trying to collect some \$200 apiece in yearly dues from members who increasingly feel the union does nothing to protect them. But the rulers feel no need to accord New York union officials a place on any boards—not for now. Why should they? These union misleaders are already cooperating fully with the cutback war.

A tripartite board, if established, would only be another diversion to block teachers from relying on their own power. The trick is that the "neutral" or "public" members always

line up with the bosses on crucial issues. Labor "representatives" on such boards serve only as window dressing, lending their authority and a phony air of "impartiality" to the antilabor assault.

Steelworkers have some experience with this fraud, since the Abel-McBride leadership has entrusted more and more of the workers' interests—from grievances to unresolved national contract issues—to "impartial" arbitrators. As Ed Sadlowski pointed out, "I've never met an impartial arbitrator. There ain't no such thing."

What teachers need is not "representation" on boards set up to cut our wages and school budgets, but organization of our own independent strength, together with our allies in the labor movement and the working class communities, to fight *against* all cutbacks and layoffs.

Vietnam War and arms spending

In his diatribe against Sadlowski, Shanker cited the devious motives "outsiders" like Jane Fonda might have in backing the insurgent movement in steel. "Some outsiders want to control the election," he wrote, "because they want the union to take their positions on foreign policy and defense. Small extremist groups have often had the same goal."

Shanker neglects to mention what *his* position on foreign policy is, what "outside" interests it represents, and how it was imposed on the union movement against the will of the majority.

During the entire course of the Vietnam War, Shanker—along with Meany and the bulk of the AFL-CIO officialdom—endorsed every bloody step taken by the Johnson and Nixon administrations. Year after year, the Shanker-dominated UFT delegation



Unionists protest Vietnam War. Shanker supported it.

killed every effort to put AFT conventions on record against the war.

I was teaching in New York during most of the war years, and I vividly recall Shanker's red-baiting tirades against any teacher who dared raise an antiwar position. "These are the same people who carry the NLF [National Liberation Front] flags in the demonstrations," Shanker would declare. After 40,000 UFT teachers shut down the schools to join the antiwar moratorium on October 15, 1969, this was hardly a credible charge.

As the majority of teachers, like the majority of other working people, came to oppose the war, it required heavy-handed tactics to crush antiwar efforts in the AFT. Unit-rule control over the big delegations to AFT conventions was used to defeat convention resolutions against the war. At the 1971 AFT convention in San Francisco, Shanker's threats and pressure forced the Chicago delegation to cast a bloc vote for his prowar stand—even though Chicago teachers had voted by a three-to-one margin in a local referendum for immediate U.S. withdrawal from Vietnam!

It was only at the 1972 AFT convention in St. Paul that a broad-based Vietnam Caucus was finally able to win passage of a resolution calling for "immediate and total withdrawal of all U.S. troops and military materiel from Vietnam and Indochina." Shanker then refused to abide by the adopted policy of the national union. As AFT representative in the councils of the AFL-CIO he continued to back the prowar stand of George Meany.

As Ed Sadlowski has pointed out, "The position the AFL-CIO leadership took on Southeast Asia was a tragedy. Who's the guy that was going? It was my son that works in the steel mill. It's not the banker's boy. The kid in the

damn trenches in Viet Nam, that was the working-class kid."

Today, government funds are being taken away from schools while the bloated, \$120-billion-plus Pentagon budget is boosted to the highest levels in history. The Democratic and Republican politicians claim this is necessary for our "national security." But what does the Pentagon budget have to do with the security of teachers or students?

This money goes to prop up dictatorships like those in Chile, South Korea, and Iran. It goes to carry out CIA spying and assassination plots. It goes to stockpile nuclear weapons capable of wiping out humanity.

Shanker not only supports this squandering of our tax dollars, so desperately needed for social services—he calls for more of it! He was a signer of a report issued by the "Coalition for a Democratic Majority" urging an eighteen-billion-dollar increase in arms spending.

Shanker doesn't mind outsiders dictating union policy on foreign affairs—so long as the outsiders are the State Department and the Pentagon. When he slanders opponents of his anti-working-class positions as representing "small extremist groups," he only shows the contempt he has for the majority of working people

Civil rights: affirmative action, quotas, seniority

One of the most urgent questions of strategy for teachers is our relations with the Black, Chicano, Puerto Rican, and other minority communities. Students from these minorities are, in fact, the majority in New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, Los Angeles, Atlanta, New Orleans, and many other school systems.

Throughout American history these

victims of racial discrimination have received the worst education—or no education at all. Today they are demanding equality. In addition to calling for smaller classes, better programs, and more money for the schools, Blacks and other minorities have been demanding:

- More minority teachers;
- An end to discrimination in hiring and layoffs;
- Desegregation of the schools, through busing and other means;
- Bilingual-bicultural education for Chicanos, Puerto Ricans, and others whose first language is not English;
- A community voice in determining the education of their children.

Teachers' unions and the minority communities should be natural allies in the fight for better education. But the policies of the Shankerite AFT leadership sabotage such an alliance by opposing all the major demands of Blacks and other minorities for equal rights.

Shanker bristles at the charge that his policies are racist, pointing to his support for southern civil rights protests in the early 1960s. But for more than a decade Shanker's main fire has been directed at what he calls "racism in reverse"—that is, the false charge that gains for minorities will mean "discrimination" against whites.

Although he neglected to mention it in his column, Shanker must have been outraged at the pledge by Steelworkers Fight Back to institute full representation of minorities and women at all levels of union staff and leadership, proportional to their membership in the union.

Shanker, after all, is one of the AFL-CIO officialdom's most vehement opponents of quotas to increase minority representation on the job, in the unions, or in any facet of society. "Merit," he argues, must be the sole criterion—thus

feeding the racist notion that minorities are not qualified to be teachers, doctors, lawyers, and so on.

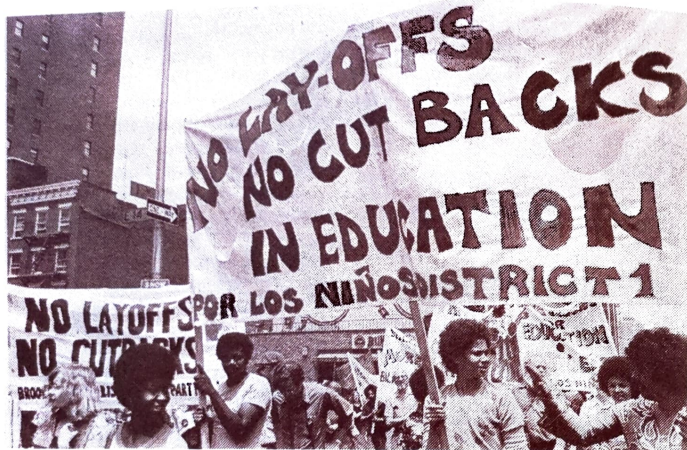
The truth is that capitalist society has had a "quota system" for centuries, one that *excludes* minorities from jobs in the professions or skilled trades.

Despite advances Blacks and other minorities have won toward formal legal equality, racist discrimination is so pervasive and insidious in this society that unless oppressed groups are given special consideration in education, hiring, and promotion, the traditional "quota system" will keep them at the bottom of the heap. Preferential treatment and quotas are necessary as a step toward real social equality.

Black journalist Roger Witherspoon, arguing against Sidney Hook, a close cothinker of Shanker's, explained that the antiquota stance "is equivalent to having two men run a mile race, but requiring one to carry a 50-pound sack on his back. Halfway through the race, the judges say, 'Stop; this is unfair.' They remove the weight, but tell the runners to continue from where they are. Though Hook seems to think this is sufficient, an unjust handicap has given the unencumbered runner a lead that the other cannot hope to close without help."

One important tool for maintaining and enforcing the "unjust handicap" against minorities is union seniority systems that make no adjustment for past discrimination. To applause from Shanker and the AFL-CIO Executive Council, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in June 1977 that such seniority systems could stand, even though they admittedly perpetuate racial and sexual discrimination.

To its credit, the National Education Association leadership opposed the Supreme Court ruling. "We say that seniority is not valid if it has the effect



Demonstrating against the cutbacks.

Flax Hermes

of perpetuating discrimination," said Robert Chanin, general counsel and deputy executive director of the NEA. "Regardless of background, when a layoff reduces the female or minority contingent beyond acceptable levels, seniority should be modified. . . . We believe that affirmative action should be the basis for modifying seniority."

Within the AFT as well, a growing number of teachers are being convinced that consistent opposition to discrimination necessitates support to quotas and modification of seniority. The May 1977 state convention of the 30,000-member California Federation of Teachers adopted a resolution favoring modification of seniority so that in the event of layoffs, "no 'protected group' under affirmative action shall be disproportionately affected."

The CFT also went on record against the *Bakke* decision of the California State Supreme Court, which had struck down a medical school admissions program that set aside 16 out of 100 positions for "disadvantaged students."

The court called this "discrimination in reverse," and Shanker hailed the ruling as confirming his opposition to quotas. The CFT delegates held that "past experience has demonstrated that without specific objectives, or quotas, there is little reason to believe that past discriminatory practices will not be reinstated."

The poisonous logic of Shanker's position was seen in November 1976 when the federal Office for Civil Rights, after a two-and-a-half-year study, found that the New York City public school system discriminates against Black and Latino teachers in hiring, promotions, and assignments. "We have also found the system denied women access to positions as principals and assistant principals, and paid women athletic coaches less than men," said Martin Gerry, director of the Office for Civil Rights.

The city schools, with a pupil population of 67 percent "minorities," in 1975 employed only 13 percent Black or Latino teachers. That is the poorest

showing among the five largest school systems in the country. Even these figures don't tell the full story. Layoffs in 1976, implemented by strict seniority, reduced Black and Latino teachers to less than 5 percent of the teaching force.

Shanker's immediate reaction was to join with Irving Anker, head of the New York City Board of Education, in defending the system against all charges of discrimination. Shanker said the decentralization law, which gave some minority school districts the power to recruit some of their teachers directly, was the "real" source of racism in the schools.

In fact, Shanker—who claims to support "merit" and "quality education"—defends the New York teacher hiring test, under challenge in federal court for being racially biased and irrelevant to teaching ability.

The thread running through Shanker's stands on affirmative action, quotas, seniority, and layoffs is not "quality education" or "merit." It is defense of the relatively privileged positions of older, white, high-seniority teachers—who tend to be more conservative politically and who make up the social base for the AFT bureaucracy.

In the long run, this divisive strategy can prove suicidal to the AFT. So long as teachers are kept fighting each other for a declining number of jobs, the union will fail to protect *anyone's* job or working conditions. Unity—among teachers and between the union and the oppressed communities—can be won only when the union gives full and active support to the demands of the most oppressed.

Civil rights: busing

Shanker poses as a champion of integration when he attacks Black and Puerto Rican demands for community

control of education. But the AFT, under his leadership, failed the test when school desegregation came under violent assault in Boston in 1974 and in many other cities since then.

The all-white leadership of the Boston Teachers Union, an AFT affiliate, paid lip service to integration. But the BTU opposed the Massachusetts desegregation law as "educationally disruptive." The BTU went so far as to file suit against the court busing order handed down by Judge Arthur Garrity because of its proposals for faculty desegregation through transfers and parity hiring of Blacks and whites until the system had 20 percent Black teachers.

The same bending to racist pressure was evident at the July 1975 AFT convention in Honolulu. Abandoning the AFT's twenty-year-old position supporting school busing for desegregation, the Shanker bloc defeated every probusing resolution that delegates introduced.

Shanker argued, "Our membership, Black and white, is not united on the question of busing. . . . We do not have a mandate from our membership to say that we have researched what is the best way to desegregate Boston schools or Chicago schools or Cleveland or California or anywhere else." He spoke against teacher support to legal, peaceful probusing demonstrations sponsored by the NAACP and others.

Shanker's position came down to a refusal to offend the prejudices of racist white teachers—his base of supporters—by defending the right of Black students to be bused to desegregated schools. Shanker was also taking a cue from his Democratic Party allies, who almost without exception oppose busing or any other measure to make desegregation a reality.

During the next year hundreds of teacher activists joined together in the AFT Caucus on Desegregation and

Equality in Education. Their aim was to win the AFT to a strong probusing position.

The caucus drafted a resolution that was endorsed by some 200 officers of AFT locals throughout the country and formally submitted to the 1976 AFT convention by the California Federation of Teachers and the Washington Teachers Union. The AFT Black Caucus and the great majority of Black delegates at the 1976 convention joined the effort. The NAACP backed the desegregation caucus's work by sending its assistant director, Michael Myers, to speak at a caucus-sponsored forum on busing during the AFT convention.

The Shanker bloc managed to prevent passage of the caucus's resolution, but felt compelled to enter its own resolution with a weaker statement of support to busing as "simply one appropriate remedial tool."

The convention debate hardly settled the issue, of course, since AFT locals in Los Angeles, Chicago, and many other cities are directly confronted with the need to take a stand on court-ordered desegregation plans. Ed Sadlowski summed up the obligations of the labor movement this way: "Segregation should not exist in any society, and you've got to put every ounce of muscle to see to it that it doesn't exist. It's something the trade union movement has to be in the forefront on. Unfortunately in many segments of the trade union movement it hasn't. I don't believe that segregation will exist if the American labor movement gets serious and says no."

For teachers this is not only a moral question but one of survival. Will we stand with the Black community in its demands for equality and better schools for all? Or with the antibusing school boards that are also in the forefront of attacking our unions?

Civil rights: bilingual-bicultural education

The AFT is on record supporting bilingual education for "all students who need it during the time *they cannot yet function effectively in English*" (emphasis added). That is, Shanker holds that the only aim of a bilingual program is to make students learn English as rapidly as possible. The AFT leadership has consistently refused to support the right of Chicano, Puerto Rican, Haitian, Chinese, and other minority students to continue learning in their own language *after* English has been mastered. For minorities to preserve and enrich their cultural heritage is alien to Shanker's concept that they should seek "assimilation"—just like other immigrants in the past.

This issue was sharply posed in New York City in 1975 after a court ordered the city to provide bilingual education to all students who have difficulty with the English language. The UFT reacted with near-hysteria to the idea of Latino teachers being hired to teach in these programs. The Shankerites claimed that "unqualified" teachers who allegedly couldn't speak English were being hired as "political patronage" by community school boards where Blacks and Puerto Ricans had won a voice. "Discrimination against whites" was said to be rampant.

A floor debate at the 1975 AFT convention brought out the real basis of the Shankerite position. A California delegate moved to amend the UFT-sponsored resolution on bilingual education to provide that "teachers should be hired into the bilingual education program with full affirmative action."

One of those arguing against the amendment was UFT Vice-president Abe Levine. He warned against "creating a feeling on the part of some teachers that somehow they are going

to be pushed out *because they are not able to be fluent as of the present moment in terms of participating in a bilingual program.* . . .

"A bilingual program should be implemented slowly and carefully and at the very same time teachers should be given a massive training program . . . to give them the opportunity to learn a second language so that their jobs can be protected. . . . So we should vote down the amendment. It is a racist amendment which we should not accept" (emphasis added).

The white-job-trust mentality could hardly be expressed more flagrantly. Levine and the UFT favor delaying bilingual education until monolingual English-speaking teachers can be taught a second language. And certainly most of the UFT's older, white teachers will never become fluent in Spanish, French, Chinese, or any other second language. Meanwhile, *qualified* Spanish-speaking teachers will be denied employment in order to preserve the jobs of *unqualified* teachers.

'A cause'

The two roads represented by Steelworkers Fight Back and the Shankerite

AFT leadership diverge not only on basic trade-union policy but on the whole gamut of social issues.

Against the AFL-CIO demands to deport undocumented workers (the so-called "illegal aliens") and erect trade barriers to protect "our" industry, Sadlowski and Steelworkers Fight Back insisted that workers from other countries and other nationalities are not the enemy. "That's the bosses' game," Sadlowski repeated time and again.

To end unemployment, Fight Back said, would mean a battle against the employers to win a shorter workweek with no cut in pay.

Against the AFL-CIO's support to polluting industries that threaten to shut down if environmental standards are enforced, Fight Back declared that the profiteering employers should be made to pay for a clean environment.

Against the narrow Meany-Shanker tradition of "business unionism," Sadlowski said that the labor movement must become "a cause" again, a cause like the early CIO in the 1930s, a cause like the United Farm Workers. A cause that stands *with* the underdog, the exploited, the oppressed.

A cause that would strike at the very roots of Shankerism.

4. RISE AND DECLINE OF SHANKERISM

The problems of teacher unionism today appear to stand in sharp contrast to fifteen years of solid gains under Shanker's leadership. But a closer look at the development of the American Federation of Teachers reveals that the seeds of division and defeat were planted back during the union's heyday in the 1960s.

Teacher unionism is a relatively new phenomenon in the United States. Before 1960 not a single major AFT local held a collective bargaining con-

tract. Teacher strikes were practically unheard of. Most teachers were either unorganized or belonged to the National Education Association, at that time dominated by school boards, superintendents, and administrators, and opposed to collective bargaining.

The era of teacher collective bargaining really began with the formation of the United Federation of Teachers in New York City. In 1960 the Teachers Guild, with fewer than 3,000 members, merged with a number of militant

teachers in the High School Teachers Association to form the UFT. Soon the UFT conducted the first teachers' strike in New York City history. The 1960 stoppage lasted one day. Only 6,000 of 40,000 teachers joined the picket lines, but the strike led to union recognition and collective bargaining.

During the next five years the AFT won recognition and contracts in most of the major cities of the East and Midwest. The teachers' union movement was on its way. Teachers readily voted to strike when negotiations broke down. Settlements almost always resulted in big gains. Strikes were rarely more than two weeks long, usually less.

During nearly all of this period, the U.S. economy was booming. The years 1961-69 were the longest stretch of uninterrupted prosperity since the beginning of U.S. capitalism. Modern industry required a more highly educated work force, and the federal, state, and local governments all poured funds into expanding the schools to meet this demand.

From 1960 to 1970, total student enrollment increased by 30 percent, from 46.3 million to 60.4 million. In the same decade, school expenditures nearly tripled, from \$24.7 billion in 1960 to \$70.2 billion in 1970. As a percentage of the Gross National Product, education spending rose from 5.1 percent to 7.5 percent.

In this favorable economic climate, the AFT grew from fewer than 75,000 members in the early 1960s to nearly 400,000 less than a decade later. By 1973 it was the tenth-largest union in the AFL-CIO. (At the same time the National Education Association, several times larger, was also undergoing an internal transformation. I'll return later to these changes in the NEA.)

In 1964 Albert Shanker became president of the United Federation of Teachers, then as now the dominant

unit of the AFT nationally. When the AFL-CIO Executive Council accorded a seat to an AFT representative in 1973, Shanker, then an AFT vice-president, used the growing power of his machine to take it over the head of then-President David Selden. The next year Shanker consolidated his grip by ousting Selden as president.

The fundamental strategy of the Shanker leadership, applied on a bigger and bigger scale as years went on, was support to "friendly" politicians of the Democratic Party, along with an occasional Republican. Hundreds of thousands of dollars were collected from the members and distributed by Shanker and his executive board to their "friends."

In return for money and votes, the politicians allowed passage of limited collective bargaining rights for teachers and other public employees in some cities and states. Naturally, the Democratic politicians were glad to take credit for any and all gains won by teachers, even if a more sober analysis would have cited the teacher shortage, readily available funds, and strikes and demonstrations by teachers themselves as the mainsprings of these victories. Nevertheless, "teacher power" became synonymous with support to the Democratic Party. Few teachers foresaw the storm that was on the horizon.

Turning point: teachers vs. students

As negotiations opened for the UFT's 1967 contract, a new element entered the bargaining scene. The union proposed to grant teachers extended "rights" to permanently remove so-called disruptive students from school. It didn't offer any ideas as to where these "disrupters"—meaning mostly Black and Latino students—would be

placed or what kind of education they would receive.

(In later years the UFT escalated its proposals to include demands for cops and security guards in every school. By 1977 the Shanker leadership hailed the Supreme Court decision legalizing child-beating as contributing to "a healthy atmosphere" in the schools.)

The board of education refused to grant Shanker's discipline proposals right away in 1967. Together with board intransigence on salaries, the issue forced a one-week strike. It ended with a compromise on the "disruptive student" issue and major economic gains for teachers. But a turning point had been reached. For the first time in UFT history, Black and Latino parents in a few districts refused to support the teachers' strike. Parents cited the racist overtones of Shanker's "law and order" drive in the schools. The African-American Teachers Association decided to go into the schools and teach classes during the walkout. This opposition from minority teachers and parents should have been a warning signal to the UFT. But it was not heeded.

Before this strike the Black and Latino communities in New York were strongholds of support to the UFT. The union's central strike slogan—"Teachers want what children need"—was readily understood and backed by minority parents, who knew the racist board of education had no interest in providing quality education for their children.

In white communities, on the other hand, UFT strikes had been regularly and viciously opposed by parents who attacked unionism, "overpaid" teachers, and "big labor." The same was true of New York school administrators, organized into the Council of Supervisory Associations. The CSA opposed UFT strikes and organized the

usual scab operations to try to break them.

Now, however, a process had been set in motion to reverse teachers' views of who were their friends and who their enemies.

In 1968, 52 percent of New York City's 1.2 million students were Black or Latino. According to the central board of education's own figures, a majority of these students graduated high school as functional illiterates.

To enter a New York City college in 1968 the minimum requirement was an "academic diploma" as opposed to the "general diploma," which merely indicated a student was enrolled to one degree or another for four years of high school. In the city's segregated Black and Latino high schools, less than 7 percent of all "graduating" students received the academic diploma. The bulk of the rest were shunted into the ranks of the unemployed or into dead-end jobs at poverty wages.

The deterioration of education in New York City, and its racist bias, were noted in publications from every quarter. Studies by independent foundations, federal and state agencies, and parent groups all confirmed that city schools were an open sore. The last to recognize reality was the UFT leadership. They proclaimed the figures "exaggerated" and complained that no one mentioned the "positive accomplishments" of teachers. Unwilling to challenge the corruption and racism of the school board, Shanker could only portray dissatisfaction with the schools as an attack on teachers.

Reformers began to argue that a decentralized system was needed so that local initiative could address the problems of the schools. In 1967, five experimental projects were set up with board approval. The most important were in Harlem, Ocean Hill-Brownsville in Brooklyn, and District One on

Manhattan's Lower East Side. The great majority of students in these three districts were Black, Latino, and Asian-American. The districts elected local school boards with the right to choose their own superintendents and principals and hire their own teachers.

Financial control remained in the hands of the central board, which continued to provide the smallest budgets for schools and districts in the communities of the oppressed minorities. Decentralization proposals never dealt with the need for massive expenditures for schools, smaller classes, remedial programs, bilingual-bicultural education, replacement of racist textbooks, or an end to "tracking" minority students into assured failure. Nevertheless, minority communities seized upon the experimental projects as an opportunity to improve their schools.

Roots of 1968 strike

In Ocean Hill-Brownsville, local Superintendent Rhody McCoy and the community-elected school board sought to exercise their right to hire principals. Under the law, they had to choose from the hundreds of "eligible" names listed by the New York City Board of Examiners as having passed the city exam. *No Blacks, Puerto Ricans, or Asian-Americans appeared on the list!*

In a bold move, the district hired seven Black, Puerto Rican, and Asian principals from the New York State list of qualified principals.

Outraged school administrators in the Council of Supervisory Associations immediately filed suit to block the hiring. New York City's civil service regulations were being violated, they claimed. Shanker and the UFT—reversing a decades-old position of the UFT and its predecessors—filed a "friend of the court" brief supporting the administration.

The UFT had previously called for abolition of the Board of Examiners. The union correctly held that this body had systematically discriminated against Jewish teachers for decades. But discrimination against Jews was no longer an issue. Now a large proportion of New York teachers were Jewish. The fact that Black, Puerto Rican, and Asian-American teachers were now the victims of discrimination did not bother Shanker.

The real basis of UFT opposition to decentralization was the implication that the union would have to deal with local school boards, possibly Black and Latino dominated, rather than relying on its cozy relations with the central board of education.

Shanker and the CSA lost the skirmish over hiring minority principals.



Brian Shannon

UFT's 1968 strike against community control.

But another clash soon developed over the firing of a racist teacher by a local board. Shanker organized a citywide referendum of teachers to declare it UFT policy to strike any local school district where "vigilante" elements sought to fire teachers without "due process."

A set of code words was being established. "Vigilante" from now on meant Black and Latino parents. "Mob rule" was the epithet for community control. And "due process" became the cover for mobilizing teachers against the community.

To my knowledge this was and remains the only time that any teachers' union in this country voted to authorize strike action against parents.

A racist strike

Imagine a teachers' strike where the strikers received the full support of their employer, the police, white racist groups, all school administrators, and virtually every reactionary force in the city.

Imagine a teachers' strike in which "scabs" were arrested by police instead of escorted through the picket lines; in which school authorities chained the schools closed to keep "scabs" out; in which every major daily paper supported the strike.

This was the scene during the UFT's nine-week strike against the Black, Latino, and Asian-American communities of New York City in the fall of 1968.

On May 9, 1968, the Ocean Hill-Brownsville community board transferred thirteen teachers out of the local district to the central board for reassignment elsewhere. I stress that the teachers were *transferred*. In previous years thousands of others had been similarly transferred. Many were antiwar activists or teachers who rejected bureaucratic curbs on their teaching

techniques. The UFT rarely raised an objection. The union was considered to be bound by the contract. No "due process" was required in transfer cases.

But this time the teachers were transferred by a Black, Latino, and Asian-American school board. The UFT immediately invoked the "mini-strike" referendum and struck the Ocean Hill-Brownsville district. Most teachers in the district saw through the racist maneuver and opposed the strike. Only 68 out of about 700 teachers walked out.

The UFT propaganda machine, backed by the big-business press and the board of education, launched a massive, demagogic campaign claiming that the Ocean Hill-Brownsville teachers had been "fired" and that the strike was in defense of "due process."

When schools opened that fall, the UFT demanded reinstatement of the transferred teachers along with the other Shanker loyalists who had walked out in support of them. School authorities agreed, but parents and community activists did not. Thousands of them surrounded the district schools to keep the racists out.

In retaliation, Shanker struck the entire New York school system for nine weeks. Eleven thousand teachers—including the union's best activists and supporters of community control—correctly crossed the racist picket lines organized by the UFT leadership. We were proud to join with parents and students in opening the schools. The streets of New York became the scenes of daily mass rallies organized by Black and Latino community groups. From the NAACP to the Urban League to the Black Panther Party, the Black and Latino communities were united in opposition to the strike. Of Black groups, only the A. Philip Randolph Institute—directed by Shanker crony Bayard Rustin and partially subsidized by the UFT—backed the strike.

The central labor officialdom came under heavy pressure from New York City unions with large Black and Latino memberships—notably the hospital workers and municipal employees. Several top union officials and community leaders organized a sit-in at the office of Harry Van Arsdale, president of the central labor council, demanding an end to the strike.

Eventually, with prodding from Van Arsdale, Shanker called off the strike. He was forced to drop his central demand for the firing of McCoy and the community school board in Ocean Hill-Brownsville. But under police escort his teachers were returned to school.

The payoff

The UFT did not go unrewarded for its willingness to collaborate with the board of education, the Democratic city administration, and the white big-business structure to crush the aspirations of New York City's oppressed minorities. "Make-up" time was scheduled for the rest of the school year, with triple-time pay for holidays and double-time for a half-hour extension of the school day.

By the end of the year, New York teachers had earned more money than they would have if the strike had not occurred.

A year later, Shanker concluded negotiations on the 1969 contract without a ripple of disagreement between the board and the UFT. Under the new three-year contract the UFT got the best salary and fringe-benefit package of any teachers' union in the country. Starting salary was pegged at \$9,400. Maximum salary was to be \$16,950, to be achieved after only eight years in the system.

But the schools continued to deteriorate. And virtually all the Black and

Latino teachers in the city quit the UFT. While the gains made under Shanker's leadership seemed impressive, teachers in New York and throughout the AFT were to lose heavily as a result of the strike and the racist policy it epitomized.

Once minority communities were viewed as the enemy, the UFT found itself in strange political company—allied with some of the most reactionary politicians in the state. One consequence was the scuttling of any fight against the Taylor Law. This New York State collective-bargaining statute, passed in 1967, specifies vindictive penalties for public employee strikes. These include loss of two days' pay for every day on strike, as well as loss of all seniority, tenure, and dues checkoff. Individual strikers and their union officials are subject to imprisonment.

In June 1968, in the midst of legislative controversy over decentralization, Shanker submitted a motion to the UFT delegate assembly to "support all those state legislators who supported our decentralization legislation and oppose all those who oppose it." *This mandated UFT support to seventy of the ninety-three state legislators who voted for the strikebreaking Taylor Law.*

Armed with a \$500,000 lobbying war chest, the UFT won passage in 1969 of a bill abolishing the three experimental school districts and postponing any further decentralization moves for a year. The bill's sponsor, Republican-Conservative John Marchi—notorious for his opposition to labor and to civil liberties causes—was rewarded with a \$1,000 UFT contribution to his 1969 mayoral campaign.

A sequel to the 1968 strike has been the UFT leadership's running war against the Puerto Rican, Black, and Chinese parents in school District One. To block community control of the

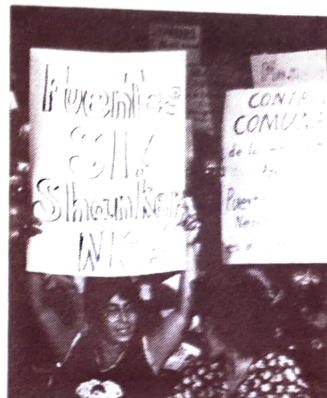
schools, the UFT has poured tens of thousands of dollars into backing racist candidates in District One and other community school board elections. (The community boards, with extremely limited power, were first elected in 1970 as a concession to community-control sentiments.)

The District One board had a pro-community-control majority for a short time in 1972-73. When Shanker's candidates regained control in 1974 they proceeded to:

- Remove the parent-supported superintendent, Luis Fuentes;
 - Dismiss fourteen parent-selected principals and supervisors;
 - Dismantle bilingual and Black studies programs set up over the past two years;
 - Fire many qualified bilingual teachers and paraprofessionals;
 - Slash the school budget in order to provide funds for patronage. For example, allocations for instructional supplies were cut by \$50,000 to provide money for a \$17,500-a-year post for a defeated UFT candidate and a \$25,000 position for a former UFT employee.
- This picture of UFT-supported administrators destroying educational programs, cutting school budgets, and firing teachers is a fitting symbol of the AFT's tragic evolution under Shankerism. Teachers find themselves relying upon their worst enemies—school boards, racists, and antilabor politicians—and pitted against their potential allies—parents, students, and the oppressed minority communities.

Political debacle

At the same time that teachers were becoming isolated from community support, Shanker's political strategy was beginning to bear strange fruit. The politicians who so freely accepted campaign contributions and endorse-



Michael Baumann
New York District One parents at board of education meeting.

ments from teachers declared, once in office, that they could find no money for the schools. The old quid pro quo was breaking down.

In 1973 the UFT formally endorsed for the first time a candidate in a New York City election—Democrat Abraham Beame for mayor. "Our endorsement of Abe Beame reflects teachers' growing political awareness," Shanker declared at the time. He praised Beame as "a progressive and enlightened public official."

The next year the UFT went all out to elect Democrat Hugh Carey as governor of New York State. Teachers had "a tremendous feeling of excitement" about Carey, Shanker said. He said Carey would work to get rid of the Taylor Law.

The results are history. Beame and Carey have spearheaded the firing of more than 20,000 school workers and the gutting of public education in New York City. They have used the Taylor Law ruthlessly against teachers who try to resist. It was Carey who voided the 1975 UFT contract and vetoed

Shanker's precious Stavisky-Goodman bill. And Beame who refused to implement the law when it was enacted over Carey's veto.

Undeterred, Shanker proposed to the UFT delegate assembly in September 1976 that the union's resources be mobilized to "ensure the election of a Democratic President of the United States and a Democratic Senator from the State of New York." Shanker explicitly counterposed Democratic Party politics to militant union action such as strikes. He told teachers that if they had taken the money lost in wages and fines resulting from the 1975 strike and instead invested it in politics, "we would now have the best politicians money can buy."

The National Education Association also joined the Carter bandwagon, giving him the NEA's first presidential endorsement in its history. NEA President John Ryor declared that the Democratic victory "signals a return to an emphasis on human concerns such as quality education for all." Carter campaign director Hamilton Jordan said the campaign was "particularly grateful" to the NEA. "All over the nation we turned to the NEA for assistance. We asked for their help, and they delivered."

5. HOW TEACHERS CAN FIGHT BACK

Teachers in both the AFT and the NEA need a new policy, a policy that unites us with our real allies and mobilizes our strength against the enemies of education and teacher unionism. I think the experiences I have described highlight key aspects of what this new policy should include:

- Democratic, rank-and-file control over all union affairs.
- Opposition to all legislation that restricts the right of teachers to orga-

What teachers' political contributions really bought, and what Carter would really deliver, became clear within weeks. The promise to provide jobs was scrapped. The fifty-dollar rebate was scrapped. The minimum-wage increase was scrapped. The pledge that Washington would take over welfare costs was scrapped. And, as Shanker himself wrote in his March 13, 1977, column: "In real dollars, schools will be getting less money under the Carter budget than they are getting now under a budget which the Congress compelled President Ford to accept."

Shanker continued in disbelief: "It cannot be that the President does not mean to keep his oft-stated commitment to a larger federal support for education."

It cannot be, one might think, that the union leaderships will learn absolutely nothing from the consequences of relying on the Democrats. But in May 1977 the New York City Central Labor Council voted to endorse Abraham Beame for another term as mayor. Shanker was conveniently absent for the vote, but has said nothing to criticize the endorsement.

Teachers in New York can only shudder when they hear Beame's campaign slogan: "I want to finish the job."

nize and strike. Rejection of arbitration schemes and labor-management boards that curtail this right.

- Jobs for all teachers by cutting class sizes and improving the quality of education.
- Decent pay for teachers and other school employees, with an escalator clause in all contracts to ensure that paychecks keep pace with the rising cost of living.
- Take the tax burden for education

off working people. Full federal funding of education by taxing the corporate profiteers, the banks, and the rich. Use the \$120-billion war budget for education and other social services.

- Support to the demands of Blacks, Latinos, and other oppressed minorities for desegregation, community control of schools, bilingual-bicultural education, affirmative action in hiring, and an end to discriminatory layoffs.

- Support to the demands of women for ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment, affirmative action, child-care centers, paid maternity leave, and an end to the attacks on abortion rights.

- Full representation of women and minorities at every level of union leadership.

- Support freedom of speech and assembly for students. Outlaw child-beating and get all cops out of the schools.

As teachers begin to organize themselves to fight for such a program, they will find reservoirs of working class support undreamed of in the Shanker era. But to fight effectively for our interests and the interests of education, we must deal with two other vital problems: teacher unity and political action.

Teacher unity

The present factional warfare between the American Federation of Teachers and the National Education Association weakens teachers and emboldens school board attacks on both organizations. Both groups spend millions of dollars each year on "organizing" efforts that are nothing but raiding operations. Each has scabbed on the other union's strikes. The only winners in this backstabbing contest are the enemies of education.

The rise in teacher militancy that

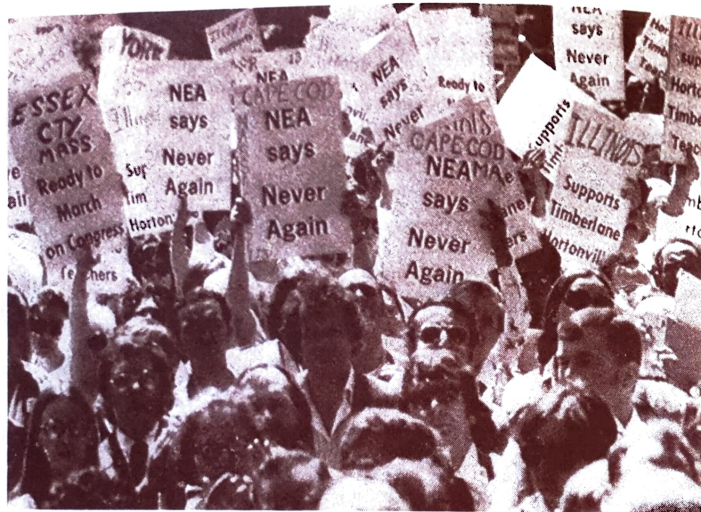
fueled the AFT's growth in the 1960s also prompted a fundamental transformation of the NEA. Originally a "strictly professional," loosely organized association, the NEA began to function in a growing number of areas as a union of teachers. It engages in collective bargaining and strikes. NEA members have been jailed and fired for striking in defense of their union rights. In this respect there is no difference between the NEA and AFT.

On social issues the NEA has responded far better than the AFT to the demands of minorities and women. The NEA supports school desegregation and busing, bilingual education, and affirmative action. Little has been done, however, to mobilize the nearly two million members of the NEA behind these progressive stands.

The fundamental strategy of the NEA leadership is no different from that of the AFT: reliance upon the Democratic and Republican parties. Both teacher organizations give vast amounts of money to the same double-dealing politicians and practice the same ineffectual lobbying efforts. Neither has sought to rally masses of teachers in independent actions to defend education.

Together the NEA and the AFT are estimated to have spent more than \$2 million in the 1974 elections; undoubtedly the 1976 figure was higher. The bulk of this money comes from the NEA. The NEA leadership boasts that 84 percent of the congressional candidates it backed in 1976 won office. This is supposed to represent "progress" since 1974, when 81 percent were elected. And what progress have the schools made as a result of this support to the Democrats and Republicans?

On paper the NEA appears to be more democratic than the AFT. But its leadership manipulates conventions and stifles opposition as readily as



NEA 1974 national rally protesting firing of eighty-four striking members of Hortonville (Wisconsin) Education Association.

Shanker does—only with a less heavy-handed style. Rank-and-file teachers are free to raise proposals at NEA conventions, but in the inadequate time provided for discussion these are unlikely ever to reach the floor, much less to be fully debated. NEA constitutional provisions for proportional representation of minorities are winked at when they might prove embarrassing to state or local affiliates. Both the NEA and AFT actually function as *staff organizations* run by hired bureaucrats, not as fighting unions controlled by the ranks.

Ostensibly, the main issue dividing the two is the question of affiliation to the AFL-CIO, which Shanker insists is a precondition to teacher unity. This is a sham issue all around. Teachers no more have to affiliate to the AFL-CIO to be part of the labor movement than do the United Auto Workers, United Mine Workers, Teamsters, or United Electrical Workers—all independent

unions. Shanker raises this demand basically because he *opposes* NEA-AFT merger unless he is assured control of the merged union.

NEA opposition to affiliation with the AFL-CIO has two aspects. One is a healthy revulsion at the racism and conservatism of the Meany clique. The other is the backward prejudice, still deeply ingrained in many teachers, that they are “professionals” in the sense of being somehow better than other working people. But the school boards that refuse to raise our salaries and the cops who bust up our picket lines don’t treat us as “professionals.” They treat us as workers. That’s what we are, and that’s how we have to organize ourselves.

Teachers have to understand—and be able to explain—that our interests as public employees are not counterposed to those of other working class taxpayers. We have a common interest in fighting for better schools and a higher

standard of living. As teachers we do need to be part of the labor movement—which is not the same as being in the AFL-CIO.

This is where the example set by Steelworkers Fight Back becomes so important. Fight Back put forward to hundreds of thousands of steelworkers and other unionists the key elements of a program to unite and defend *all* workers. Steelworkers Fight Back points the way toward a democratic and revitalized labor movement that will *attract* teachers, parents, and students to its cause, and that will *support* us in our struggles.

Any movement of teachers to fight back along these lines will have to stand for teacher unity—unity in fact, not demagoguery. The crucial first step is to work in both the AFT and the NEA for *common actions*—to support strikes, to oppose cutbacks, to defend desegregation, or around other issues vital to teachers. Such local actions will pave the way for teacher unity on a wider and wider scale.

A second vital step is to reject the LOSE—“Lay Off Somebody Else”—strategy of virtually all public employees facing budget cutbacks today. Instead of falling for the divide-and-rule trap, teachers need to seek alliances with other public employees and with those who depend on social services to fight against *all* layoffs and *all* cutbacks.

An indication of the potential response to such a strategy was seen at the May 1977 California Federation of Teachers convention. Over the opposition of the top CFT leadership, the delegates passed a resolution urging the convening of “a national conference of all public employee unions, including SEIU, AFSCME, NEA, to discuss steps to be taken to develop a united labor strategy.”

Political action

The big problems facing teachers today can be resolved only through political action. The leaders of both the AFT and the NEA agree on that. Educational funding, collective-bargaining rights, discrimination and segregation—all are settled ultimately by the government.

But the political strategy of the NEA and the AFT has proven to be a dead end. This was ironically summed up in the headlines of two facing pages of the April 1977 *American Teacher*. One page declared “Political Action Gets Results” and urged teachers to give ten dollars to AFT COPE (Committee on Political Education).

The headline on the facing page was: “House Betrays Labor; Rejects Situs Picketing Bill.” The accompanying article said, “Labor officials were stunned at the betrayal.” But, it added, “labor itself readily accepts responsibility for the tactical error of placing too much trust in the Congress it had just helped to elect.”

Everywhere the story is the same. The “friendly” Democrats and Republicans of a few years ago are today proclaiming austerity, slashing school budgets, and attacking the unions. This phenomenon is so universal that it cannot reasonably be ascribed to “betrayals” by individual politicians. Nor is the political error by labor a “tactical” one. The real problems lie deeper.

Instead of boom and prosperity, the world capitalist economy has entered a permanent crisis marked by inflation, high unemployment, sudden shortages, breakdowns, and monetary instability. To bolster their profits, the capitalists in every country seek to hold down wages and increase labor productivity.

The drive against government spending on social services is rooted in the desire of big business interests to

damper *on* (they cannot end it) and to *reduce business taxes*. The strength of this latter desire can be seen in the well-publicized flight of industry to those states that offer the worst public services—and the highest business tax breaks.

Even clearer is the latest New York City budget, the culmination of three years of "fiscal crisis." The budget projects continued cutbacks in schools, health care, and other services the city "can't afford"—while giving millions of dollars to business in newly reduced taxes.

The union movement, despite its present weakened and subservient condition, is an obstacle to all these plans to make working people pay for the economic crisis. That's why Meany and Company have been getting kicked around so unmercifully by the Carter administration and other politicians they helped elect.

The politicians of both the Democratic and Republican parties are simply responding to the dictates of the big-business interests that control those parties.

Despite its pretense of representing workers and the poor, the Democratic Party is absolutely committed to upholding capitalist profits and the profit system. This commitment *compels* the Democratic politicians—be they conservative, liberal, or even radical-sounding—to follow "Republican" policies today.

One of the most grotesque examples in recent memory was the crushing of the Atlanta sanitation workers' strike in April 1977 by Black Democratic Mayor Maynard Jackson. Jackson, a former labor lawyer elected to office with backing from AFSCME, the NEA, and other unions, fired more than 1,000 strikers and replaced them with scabs. The crime of these workers, 80 percent of whom are Black, was to demand an

increase in their sub-poverty-level wages, which had been virtually frozen for thirty months.

At the 1975 AFT convention in Honolulu, Shanker felt compelled to note that many union members were "disappointed because the candidate we helped to support turned around and voted wrong on this very important issue." Shanker's advice was as follows: "One of the things that our own members will have to be educated to is that if we elect somebody and they perform poorly and then if we decide to resign from politics, we are doing that person a favor. We should go right into the next race and see that that person learns a very poor lesson."

But "resigning from politics" or continuing to support our enemies are not the only alternatives. A new kind of political action is possible and necessary: *independent labor political action*.

Labor party

Labor gives money to the Democrats and Republicans but has no control whatsoever over their actions. Wouldn't that money and effort be better used to put forward working men and women as independent labor candidates?—candidates chosen by the unions, accountable to the unions, and representing the interests of all working people.

I'm not talking about so-called "labor" candidates running as Democrats. As soon as a candidate or union accepts the political framework of the Democratic Party—even with the best of intentions—they inevitably end up subordinating the interests of labor to the overall antilabor program of the Democrats. Rather, I mean building toward a mass, independent political party of labor that challenges both the Democrats and Republicans for control of the government.

Such a labor party, because it would

be based on the mass organizations of working people, would be a completely different type of party from the Democrats and Republicans.

It would be democratically controlled by workers.

It would fight year-round for our interests—not only by running candidates, but by organizing protests, demonstrations, and rallies that mobilize our own power as workers.

It would support strikes, not break them like the Democrats and Republicans do.

A labor party—instead of opposing abortion rights, busing, and affirmative action—would champion the rights of women and minority workers. It would fight against deportations and promote solidarity of all working people regardless of race or nationality.

A labor party would help cut across the divisions between public employees and other workers. It would expose the lie that there is "no money" for social services. It would fight to reverse the present tax structure and spending priorities of the government.

A mass labor party is not about to spring into existence tomorrow. Most workers still have illusions in the Democrats, although experience is beginning to break down those illusions. In addition, the present union leadership is deeply tied to the two-party system and to the procapitalist program of these parties. The union officials actually rely upon the employers and the capitalist parties to defend their power and privileges as high-paid union bureaucrats.

For this reason the idea of a labor party is intimately tied to the fight to

democratize and transform the unions. We don't want a labor party run by the George Meany and Albert Shankers—and they don't want any labor party at all. What we need is a fighting and democratic labor movement that uses independent political action to defend the interests of all workers and all the oppressed.

It will be a big step in this direction when teachers and other unionists simply stop relying upon the capitalist politicians.

Instead, let's organize united mass demonstrations in the streets to save public education. That is a form of political action.

Let's fight side by side with other public employees and with the Black, Latino, and other minority communities against the bipartisan budget-cutters. That is a form of political action.

The activists of both the AFT and the NEA who come together to promote such actions—especially the young, Black, and Latino teachers—will out of their own experiences develop an alternative program to Shanker's class collaboration and racism. They will begin to constitute an alternative leadership to the Shanker clique.

From beginnings in the defensive actions of teachers under attack today, a new generation of activists can democratize and transform the teachers' unions. And in alliance with fighting movements of steelworkers, auto workers, miners, farmworkers, truck drivers, office workers, and others yet to emerge, we can transform the entire labor movement and lay the groundwork for a new and better society.